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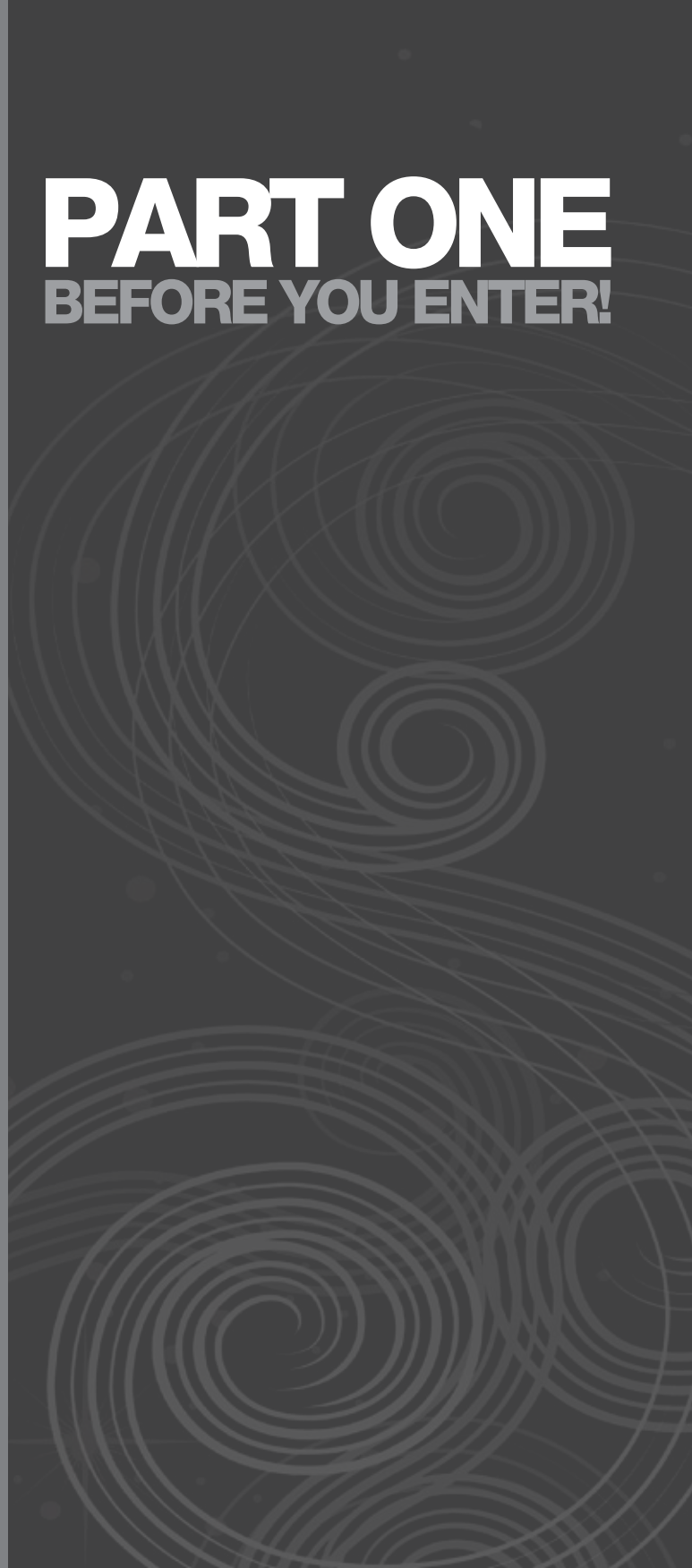
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PART ONE

BEFORE YOU ENTER!



INTRODUCTION

(PLEASE READ THIS FIRST!)

WHAT'S IN THIS BOOK?

This book includes seven experiences to help you and the group you lead *enter* God's Story. Detailed instructions, supply lists, and handouts are included. All of the handouts plus additional resources are available on the accompanying CD.

Every experience takes you on a journey to explore some of the major milestones in the Bible, helping your group learn, interact with, and place themselves as a part of God's continuing Story.

HOW DO I USE THESE EXPERIENCES?

Each experience has multiple stations or stopping points for groups to learn, interact, or pray. Most of these stations are oriented around interaction, while some focus on solo learning. These stations offer a lot of flexibility and options for how you use each experience. For example:

- Do one experience during your regular **youth program** (two to two-and-a-half hours).
- Do several experiences in a **retreat setting**.
- Do one experience over several weeks—in other words, do **a station a week** in a Sunday school class.
- Do a weeklong intensive **camp** using all of the experiences.
- Insert **your idea** here_____.

Please make the experiences you find in this book your own. Omit parts, add parts—whatever you need to do to connect with your group. More ideas for how to use these experiences can be found in the chapter “How to Set Up the Seven Experiences.” You

can also contact me at michael@echothestory.com if you want some help brainstorming uses for your ministry context.

WHY I WROTE THIS BOOK

I developed this book as a practical resource to provide simple ideas to help you take a group on a journey into the Bible Story. My hope is that as you immerse yourselves in God's Story, you'll discover profound meaning for your lives.

I also hope this book inspires you to dream beyond its pages, sparking creativity as you plan your own environments to help people learn and engage in deeper ways.

WHERE DID THESE EXPERIENCES COME FROM?

After more than a decade in youth ministry, I felt as though I'd tried everything to help teenagers connect with the Bible—with limited success. My students most often described Bible study as confusing, boring, irrelevant or too much work.

Through a chance encounter with a missionary to Africa, I discovered a unique, ancient way to engage people with God's Word, and it's rooted in the Hebrew tradition: Chronological Bible Storying. It's a sequential telling of Bible stories followed by a time of creative retelling and in-depth dialogue.

Soon I began a "storying experiment," telling and discussing Bible stories with a group of high schoolers for nine months straight. That experience completely transformed my youth group (and me), as they were truly shaped by God's Story.

The more we dove into the Story, the deeper their insights and questions became. One of my teens described it this way: "For the first time I felt like I could relate to the characters in the story...I saw them as real, plausible, and many-sided. They became real people doing real things...It challenged me to listen to God and obey his calling...to live in God's will fully. I need to surrender everything to God."

Another teen said, "It made me realize I need to live for the Author. God has a story for my life that I'm excited to discover and want to share with others. This amazing story is what we've been waiting for our entire lives."

I'd discovered more than just a new curriculum or fad. It was a different way of learning that helped teenagers build a lasting theological foundation. It challenged them to discover who they are and why they're here—to find themselves in a greater Story. (You can learn more about this method and my experiences with it at www.echothestory.com and in my first book, *Shaped by the Story: Helping Students Encounter God in a New Way*.)

These experiences fueled my desire to help others center their ministries on God's Story and “experiment” with more effective methods that help teens learn.

When I was given the opportunity to develop a new weeklong intensive discipleship event for a youth ministry organization a few years ago, naturally I wanted God's Story to be the centerpiece. With a team of people, I explored how to design an event that immersed teenagers in biblical narrative. The result is a unique event called Merge.

As a starting point, Merge uses Bible Storying—creative storytelling, retelling, and dialogue—each morning to help youth learn about God's Story and discover connections and implications. Each afternoon, youth groups participate in a Group Experience—an imaginative, hands-on activity that helps adolescents dig deeper into God's Story and discover meaning for their lives. Art and media, learning stations, and interactive experiences propel teenagers toward creative responses to the stories each evening. My hope for Merge is that teenagers are transformed and *merge* their stories with God's, joining in God's mission of love and restoration. (To find out more about Merge, go to: www.mergeexperience.com)

The seven experiences described in this book were originally developed for the Merge Event. I've also used them for youth group meetings and retreats over the past several years. I have used them effectively with both youth and adult groups. More than a thousand adolescents have gone through some version of these experiences, helping me make them what they are today. A dozen friends and colleagues also contributed to shaping them.

Given the right guidance and environment, teenagers will surprise us with their insights, creativity, and dreams to change the world. I hope you'll experiment with me, empowering young lives to see themselves as part of something bigger—a new way of living under God's reign that can change everything! Together, let's enter the Story.

STEP INTO THE STORY

ENTERING IN VERSUS TAKING OUT

We live in a culture of evaluation. People working in the media, news, and entertainment industries make millions of dollars as professional critics. Entire television shows, magazines, and blogs are dedicated to evaluating what people wear on the red carpet on the night of the Academy Awards. We love to watch shows like *American Idol* and *Dancing with the Stars* because we get to cast our votes and be the judges from the comfort of our own living rooms. We nod in agreement or wince in disapproval as celebrity judges dissect the talent of burgeoning celebrities. We eat this stuff up!

I believe our culture of evaluation and critique somehow influences way more than our choices in entertainment. I believe Americans are a people of comparison. We define ourselves by how we measure up to others.

I spent the better portion of my school years comparing everything about myself to others—my style, clothes, looks, attitude, abilities—trying to find the middle of the road so I'd blend in. It's kind of sad to think about now, but I was adrift in a sea of evaluation. I wish I could say I'm now completely free of this, but I believe we'd all admit that a culture of comparison has tainted us. My hope is that as someone who's given myself to follow Christ, God's Spirit will break me from my patterns of comparison and replace them with rhythms of compassion and love.

I'm concerned that a culture of evaluation is also alive in our churches. Many of us sit in the pews and on comfy, padded seats each Sunday, taking in carefully crafted programs that are designed to challenge and inspire. Often the first question asked during the ride home is, "*So what did you think of the sermon?*" or "*What was going on with that special music?*" or "*What did they teach in Sunday school?*" These questions may be asked with good intentions, but they emit an aura of evaluation. Unfortunately, many of us have become critics from the pew—consumers of church who feel a right to a certain quality of product being delivered to us and to our children. This mindset projects further into how we come to the Bible.

Even those of us with professional Bible training have been taught to use one primary approach to the Bible—analytical. The tool we've been given is a magnifying glass, so we can

dissect each chapter, verse, and word. We parse and dig for the meaning behind the meaning in the smallest increments. We've become scientists attempting to turn the beautiful, mysterious stories and poems that make up most of the Bible into actionable and practical steps for living. I'm not suggesting that we discard the magnifying glass—it's a good tool to use at times. For instance, I've found it insightful and fascinating to explore the meaning of biblical words in their original language. Words can give us windows into context and culture that help bring greater understanding. This takes careful examination that only the magnifying-glass approach provides. But if this is our *only* approach to the Bible, then we've made it (and it's made us) into something it was never intended to be. This manifests itself especially in the way we teach the Bible.

Author Colin Harbinson explains, "As the biblical story unfolds, it does so in stories and poetry. In fact, approximately seventy-five percent of scripture consists of narrative, fifteen percent is expressed in poetic forms and only ten percent is propositional and overtly instructional in nature. In our retelling of the same story, we have reversed this biblical pattern. Today an estimated ten percent of our communication is designed to capture the imagination of the listener, while ninety percent is purely instructive."¹

Theologian Richard Jensen puts it this way: "Our literate tradition trained us to find the ideas in the Bible and shape them in logical ways for the preaching task. We have learned how to use Scripture as the source of ideas we wish to inculcate in the life of our people. There is another possibility. We can also fill their heads with people! We can tell biblical stories in such a way that the characters of the Bible come to live in the hearts and minds of our listeners! One of the ways in which Christ can be formed within us is the way of biblical characters living within our consciousness."²

But the much more widespread emphasis on analyzing the Bible and repackaging it in the form of ideas has contributed to a culture of Christians who stand apart from the Bible in evaluation—not necessarily looking for errors, but viewing it with a critical eye and lumping Scripture into the same category as self-help books. We scan it for nuggets of truth, points of meaning, parables for life, axioms for leadership, and models for ministry—and some of it's there and certainly helpful. But this approach still puts us in a place where we're standing outside the Bible's Story, disconnected from its context and straining to see its relevance for our lives.

Even worse, we lose sight of the Bible's bigger story of redemption and restoration, and we miss how we're a part of this sweeping narrative.

- 1 Colin Harbinson, "Restoring the Arts to the Church: The Role of Creativity in the Expression of Truth," *Lausanne World Pulse Magazine* (online), July 2006, edited from a chapter in *The Complete Evangelism Guidebook*, Scott Dawson ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2006), <http://www.lausanneworldpulse.com/themedarticles.php/409/07-2006> (accessed May 15, 2008).
- 2 Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (Lima, Ohio: CSS Publishing, 1993), 9.

But what if we decided to enter into the Bible instead of always trying to take from it? What if we stepped inside of this story instead of pulling it apart?

The Bible story doesn't make a lot of sense when just looked at from the outside and in bits and pieces. We must enter into it in order to see it. How do we *enter* into God's Story? I have a couple of suggestions:

EMPOWER OUR IMAGINATIONS AND SENSES

"Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world." —ALBERT EINSTEIN³

We must let go of our tendencies to analyze and extrapolate from Scripture and give ourselves freedom to explore and learn in new ways. If we're always taking a posture of evaluating the Bible, it will constrict us.

I'm not suggesting we check our brains at the door. On the contrary, I'm suggesting we think more deeply—using our imaginations, intuition, and creativity—to make meaningful connections. Exploring the Bible through these channels will take us to new places that our rational and evaluative minds couldn't go on their own.

What I'm suggesting is that we use story and experiential learning as a gateway to enter God's Story. These approaches to learning are fueled by imagination and are the foundation of the experiences you'll find in this book.

Author and theologian C. S. Lewis writes, "For me, reason is the natural organ of truth; but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination, producing new metaphors or revivifying old, is not the cause of truth, but its condition."⁴

Sarah Arthur, in her book *The God-Hungry Imagination*, writes, "Imagination gives us the ability to find and make purposeful patterns and even plotlines: in other words, the ability to find and make meaning." She continues, "Imagination is how we put things together. It's how we make connections between thought and experience, word and image, self and other, seen and unseen."⁵

I believe that imagination fuels the transformation process. It's the key to processing the abstract and building faith. It gives context and moves us toward learning that's internalized

3 As quoted in "What Life Means to Einstein: An Interview by George Sylvester Viereck" in *The Saturday Evening Post* Vol. 202 (26 October 1929), p. 117.

4 C.S. Lewis, *Selected Literary Essays*, ed. Walter Hooper (Cambridge University Press, 1969).

5 Sara Arthur, *The God-Hungry Imagination: The Art of Storytelling for Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Nashville, Tenn: Upper Room Books, 2007), 49, 53.

and acted upon. It helps us weave an interior pattern that makes sense of life. And in order to create the best environments for transformation, we must take every opportunity to cultivate imagination in our ministries.

To enter into stories requires us to empower our imaginations and transport ourselves into a different time. Bible stories are embedded in an ancient culture that we must creatively move to understand in order to participate in the story. The Hebrew word for *remember* is *zah-khor*, and it's a word that means much more than just recalling something from the past; it suggests active engagement—*reliving and participating in again*. We're called to help others participate again in the ancient stories of our spiritual ancestors. It's there that we can find meaning and purpose for our lives.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE AS A NARRATIVE

We're called to live in a story that's still unfurling. The Bible story isn't just a story from the past; it's a living story, one of vibrancy and dimension. It's incarnational, entering our lives differently than other stories can. God calls us to enter this story, allowing it to shape and guide our lives.

When engaged as narrative, the Bible Story has a subtle way of getting into our heads and under our skin. At first it seems nonintrusive because it's a faraway story about a distant people. But then it begins to work on us—the messages beneath the surface emerge, and we're captivated by its story. We find ourselves inside that story, identifying and empathizing with the characters. It becomes part of our experience and identity—it's now our story.

This is called *implication*, which has a much different meaning from *application*. Many of us have been trained to first ask, "How does the Bible apply to me?" Yet, application literally means "to put on the surface." Thus, as with a Band-Aid or salve, we try to administer the Scriptures to our own situations.

To be implicated is to be bound with, wrapped up, and twisted together like the strands of a rope. The word *implicate* comes from the Latin word meaning "folded in." We become intertwined and folded in to God's Story, and it speaks to and informs us in regard to who we are, and why we're here.

So our question moves from "How do I apply this to my situation?" to "What does this mean for the way I live my life?" We begin to seek our role in the story, rather than try to figure out what to do with it.

Implication calls us toward something—to redefine what we know, to a new way of life lived with our community of faith. God's Story cultivates hope within us. We begin to envision how we can change our community, our world, and ourselves.

Eugene H. Peterson, translator of *The Message*, describes it this way:

Stories are the most prominent biblical way of helping us see ourselves in “the God story,” which always gets around to the story of God making and saving us. Stories, in contrast to abstract statements of truth, tease us into becoming participants in what is being said. We find ourselves involved in the action. We may start out as spectators or critics, but if the story is good (and the biblical stories are very good!), we find ourselves no longer just listening to but inhabiting the story.”⁶

As we enter into God’s Story through narrative, a whole new world is open to us. We begin to get a sense of God’s entire interconnected story and discover how it intersects with our own stories. The narrative, in turn, clarifies our place in God’s Story and helps us take the focus off ourselves and aim it toward God’s desires for the world. It’s what gives shape and context to our lives as we follow in the ways of Jesus. If we allow it to speak into, inform, and reorder our lives, it will guide us to discover our role in God’s kingdom.

ENTER THE BIBLE THROUGH STORIES AND EXPERIENCES

My hope is that the seven experiences in this book will help your group begin a journey of entering into the story and interacting with it in tangible and imaginative ways. I’m not an expert on Hebrew culture, but I do believe these experiences will help you step into the world of the Bible as you think about what it was like, pray, discuss, wonder, reflect, and rest awhile. If we let the stories surround us, God will do powerful things in our lives.

6 Eugene H. Peterson, “Introduction to the Book of Jonah,” *The Message Remix*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2006), 1352.

EXPERIENCE FOUR

THE TABERNACLE

DEVELOPED BY MICHAEL NOVELLI
WITH SETH MCCOY

*INSTRUCTIONS

DESCRIPTION

Participants will enter the Tabernacle to learn more about the customs and rituals of the Israelites and reflect on what this might mean for their own lives. Handouts will guide participants to interact with objects from the Tabernacle at each station and connect some of the symbols to Jesus.

LOCATIONS AND LOGISTICS

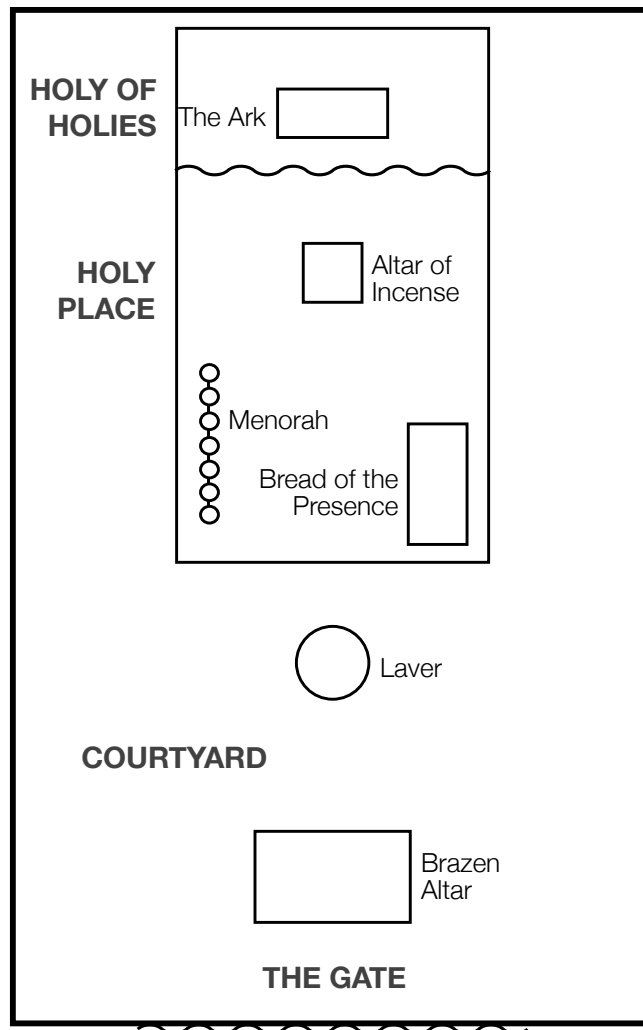
- There are 10 stations—each one takes about six minutes to complete with time to move between stations. The journey should take about 75 minutes altogether.
- It will take four or five people to run this experience. It should be fairly simple to set up, depending on how much prep work there is to get the spaces ready. Unless you have an outdoor tent, stations should be set up in an open room. These stations should take about five to ten minutes each to set up.
- One staff facilitator is needed for every two stations (although Station 10 doesn't need any adult support), and instructions are provided for each facilitator. One of the most important roles of the facilitator is to gently keep the groups moving through the experience on schedule. After a group leaves a station, the facilitator will reset the station, if necessary, and cue the next group.

*INSTRUCTIONS

- Create a reflective atmosphere in the room—make it dimly lit with candles, play some gentle background music, and soften up the space by hanging large pieces of fabric around the room. This will help participants get a sense that this is a special place.

GROUP SIZE

People should enter in groups of six to eight, including an adult leader. If you'd like, all of the groups can meet up and talk about their experience at the last station.



STATIONS (STOPPING POINTS)

STATION 1: LIVING AROUND THE TABERNACLE

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

This will be a basic description of the function and appearance of the Tabernacle. Centered in this station will be an enlarged color illustration of the Tabernacle that participants will sit around to observe writing down their thoughts and reactions to it. This illustration (available on accompanying CD) could be printed and displayed or projected onto a screen or bed sheet.

MATERIALS

- Tabernacle illustration (available on accompanying CD).
- A video projector with computer hookup.
- A screen or large white sheet on which to project the image.
- If using a print of the illustration, you'll need a short easel and a desk lamp to display and illuminate the illustration.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 1 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 2: THE GATE

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

Participants will enter the station and face the gate: A curtain hung with either portable pipes and drapes or curtain rods and poles. At the end of this station, they'll walk through this gate to move further into their experience with God.

*INSTRUCTIONS

MATERIALS

- A pair of 7 ft. upright posts that can support a curtain rod for participants to walk underneath. (A suggestion: If you don't have pipe and drape, take two five-gallon buckets and center a seven-foot-tall two-by-four into each one. Mix some Quikrete to fill the buckets and let dry. Screws could then be run into the tops of the pieces of wood to hold a normal curtain rod.)
- Two dark-colored curtains or drapes (hanging on a rod connected to the uprights at each end) with a split in the center so people can walk through.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 2 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 3: BRAZEN ALTAR

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The altar for sacrificing animals was the first thing a person saw when entering the Tabernacle. Place large pieces of butcher paper or art paper on a table with bowls of thick, red or brown paint. Participants will put their palms into the paint, make prints on the paper, and think about having blood on their hands. They'll move on from this station with dirty hands.

MATERIALS

- A large table for eight people to gather around.
- Shallow plates or trays (large enough to fit at least one hand, if not both) to hold paint.
- A roll of butcher paper or 3M large Post-it sheets.
- A drop cloth for under the table.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 3 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 4: LAVER

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The laver immediately followed the altar so that dirty hands and feet could be washed and cleansed. Dirty hands will be placed in bowls of clean water. While their hands are coming clean, participants will pray and reflect on the cross and their new purity before God.

MATERIALS

- Eight large bowls arranged in a half circle around the station.
- Plenty of five-gallon buckets full of clean water for refilling.
- Plenty of five-gallon buckets to hold the dirty water after rinsing.
- Plenty of paper towels.
- Trash bags for dirty paper towels.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room,
- 10 copies of the Station 4 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 5: MENORAH (LAMPSTAND)

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The menorah was the source of light for the Holy Place and was a representation of Israel as a light to the nations. Participants will observe the flames and reflect on their lives and their groups. Participants will listen for anything the Holy Spirit may want to illuminate to them and then journal their thoughts.

MATERIALS

- A menorah with oil, wicks, and stand or seven candles large enough to burn for a few hours without melting out.
- A table on which to place the menorah or candles.
- 10 copies of the Station 5 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

*INSTRUCTIONS

STATION 6: BREAD OF THE PRESENCE

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

On this table are 12 loaves of bread representing the 12 tribes of Israel. At the center of this room is a table small enough for the groups to sit around and eat. They'll pass the bread and tear off pieces as they pray for each other and for their youth group's unity.

MATERIALS

- A small table to hold 12 pieces of pita bread in two stacks of six.
- Table must be a height where people can sit around it and see each other.
- Enough bread to replenish as the groups go through.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 6 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 7: ALTAR OF INCENSE

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The incense in this room is both a visual and scent-related object. As the smoke rises, participants will think about their worries, anxieties, and fears and let them rise to God as prayers. As they smell the scent, they'll also pray for their group.

MATERIALS

- A small table to hold the incense.
- A strong but pleasant-smelling incense that's large enough to give off a visible plume and to last for the whole experience.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 7 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

Note: *Be careful! Before you strike a match, check with the powers that be on any fire-code restrictions involving incense or candles.*

STATION 8: THE HOLY OF HOLIES AND THE VEIL

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The veil will be in the center of the room, like the gate. On the other side of the veil will be a candle, representing God's presence, and a rope coming out from under the veil. Participants will observe the veil and journal about how it would feel to be separated from God. They will then walk to the other side and sit down around the candle, symbolizing that they can now be with God.

MATERIALS

- A pair of 7 ft. upright posts that can support a curtain rod for participants to walk underneath (See suggestions from Station Two).
- Two dark-colored curtains or drapes (hanging on a rod connected to the uprights at each end) with a split in the center so people can walk through.
- A rope to run out from under the veil.
- A large three-wick candle sitting on the floor to represent God's presence.
- A candle or small light for the reader to use and to gently illuminate the room.
- 10 copies of the Station 8 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 9: THE ARK OF THE COVENANT AND THE MERCY SEAT

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The ark contained three articles that the participants will explore and journal about. The bread, stick, and stones will serve as representatives of the manna, Aaron's budding staff, and the stone tablets containing the Ten Commandments. Participants will reflect and journal on their own patterns of unfaithfulness. The group will take a white sheet and place it over these items, signifying the covering over of their unfaithfulness by the atonement of Jesus. The group will also write their names on a helium-filled balloon that they'll take with them to the last station.

*INSTRUCTIONS

MATERIALS

- A clear jar containing bread (preferably the same type of bread used in Station 6).
- A large stick the size of a walking stick or staff.
- Two medium-sized stones (the size of a cantaloupe).
- A table that can hold all of these items—such as a coffee table.
- A white sheet.
- Red helium-filled balloons with strings—one for each group (but make sure you have extras).
- 10 Sharpie markers.
- 10 copies of the Station 9 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).

STATION 10: THE RELEASE AND GROUP INTERACTION

LOCATION AND PREPARATION

The group will head outside to pray over and release their balloons, which symbolize God taking away their sin. Groups will also gather for dialogue and discussion.

- 10 copies of the Station 10 handouts—returned by participants (available on accompanying CD).



THE TABERNACLE

Introduction

EVERYONE READ SILENTLY

This is an important time to...

- Connect with God and
- Connect with others in meaningful ways.

This time requires you to...

- Slow down and turn off your cell phone.
- Enter into a different pace of life.
- Speak quietly and act respectfully.
- Think deeply and engage your mind and heart.
- Be open to what God has for you.

We hope that through this experience you'll see how your story is connected to and a continuation of a bigger Story that began thousands of years ago.

Pray quietly and ask God to help you enter the story.

You will enter this experience in groups of six to eight people. At each station, different people from your group will read parts aloud. You don't have to read if you don't want to, but as many people as possible should read and help guide the experience.

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THE TABERNACLE

Station 1

Living Around the Tabernacle

READER 1:

You're about to begin a walk-through experience of the Tabernacle. *Tabernacle* means "tent," "place of dwelling," or "sanctuary." It was a special place where God chose to meet the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness, and where the leaders and people came together to worship and offer sacrifices.

Through sight, sound, smell, and touch, you'll get a chance to imagine what the Tabernacle must have been like and to spend time connecting with God in unique ways.

Please leave the handouts in a neat stack for the next group. Now quietly proceed to Station 1 with your group.

READER 2:

God called a special people to show the world what it means to live the best possible way—God's way. These people were called the Israelites, or people of Israel, a name that means "one who struggles with God."

The people of Israel were on a long journey to return home to a place called the Promised Land. God gave their leader, a man named Moses, specific instructions about how to build a sacred meeting place called the Tabernacle.

"Have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them." —Exodus 25:8

This portable sanctuary was a tent that God inhabited while they traveled. So Moses gathered the very best craftsmen and workers to build the Tabernacle in the center of their camp. When God was present in this tent, a cloud appeared around it:

Now whenever the cloud lifted from the Tabernacle, the people of Israel would set out on their journey, following it. But if the cloud did not rise, they remained where they were until it lifted. The cloud of the LORD hovered over the Tabernacle during the day, and at night fire glowed inside the cloud so the whole family of Israel could see it. This continued throughout all their journeys. —Exodus 40:36-38 (NLT)

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THE TABERNACLE Station 1: Living Around the Tabernacle

Each day, God guided them through the desert with a cloud, sheltering them from the sun's scorching heat. During the cold desert nights, God guided them with a pillar of fire, providing warmth and light for their journey back to the Promised Land.

DISCUSS

Look at the picture of the Tabernacle. Slow down and look it over carefully. Quietly discuss your observations with your group.

- What catches your eye first?
- What details do you notice?
- What questions do you have?
- The Tabernacle was always set up in the middle of the Israelites' camp. What would it have been like to live near the Tabernacle?

READER 3:

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only [Son], who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.
—John 1:14

The word *dwelling* in this verse is the same word they used for *Tabernacle* in the Old Testament. In other words, God became human in order to dwell or to "Tabernacle" among his people. So as he walked upon the earth and lived among the people of Israel, Jesus fulfilled the picture of the Old Testament Tabernacle.

As you go through this experience today, think about how the elements you encounter can also be symbolic of Jesus.

Please put your handouts in a neat stack for the next group and continue on to the next station.

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